

LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVES OF HIGH-RANKING LEADER
FOR TVET ORGANISATIONAL EXCELLENCE IN MALAYSIA

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Dedication for this manuscript goes to:

My Coffee maker, my life and my partner, Mohd Aidil Azuan

My motivation booster, Hj Ahmad and Hjh Siti Munawarah

My supporter, Pn Kamariah Din My little chap, Aqlan Hadif

Souls trigger of my dreams, my sisters and brothers

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological qualitative inquiry is designed to explore key characteristics of leaders, which includes seeking their perspectives regarding the phenomena of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) organisational excellence beside the societal stigma from society. The aims of this study encompasses the leadership and TVET perspectives, roles, characteristics and challenges, alongside TVET organisational excellence, strategies and aspiration of high-ranking TVET leaders towards championing it in Malaysia. As TVET transformation is pioneered by high ranking leaders, the need for studies to be conducted on the topic are justified especially due to the minimal amount of knowledge available. This study has involved seven high-ranking leaders in various organisations in Malaysia who are vastly experienced in TVET. Data collection has been carried out using semi structured in-depth interview with a developed interview protocol. Participant's live experience has subsequently been subjected to conventional data analysis techniques like manual coding and Nvivo 8. Interpretation of the findings has then been made via thematic analysis, revealing 7 themes and 18 emerged subthemes in the study. The research question 1 explicates leaders define leadership as a language game where there is no agreeableness on the definition while leaders define TVET education as both mental and physical activity. Research question 2 explicates 2 forms of leadership characteristic for TVET high-ranking leaders consists of TVET leadership capabilities based on theoretical concept and TVET leadership competencies in 4 areas. TVET leaders role in international, organisation and society and also TVET leadership effectiveness by roles answer the research question 3. Research question 4 answered by 2 challenges faced by TVET high ranking leaders includes TVET disorder and human element. TVET organizational excellence as perceived by high-ranking leaders consist of awareness, KSA graduates and potent TVET system to answer research question 5. There are 6 strategies to positioning TVET organisational excellence such as transformation, unity, stakeholder buy-in, collaboration, TVET talent and media roles to answer research question 6. The future hopes for TVET organisational excellence delineates more partnership between industry and public-private institutions as an answer to research question 7. The extracts of their 'brain collections' serve as exclusive recipes for TVET organisational excellence, yielding substantive information to help practitioners in raising TVET images and allow it to soar beyond.

ABSTRAK

Kajian kualitatif fenomenologi ini dijalankan bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi segala yang berkaitan dengan seorang pemimpin termasuklah perspektif mereka tentang fenomena kejayaan TVET disebalik pelbagai penolakan masyarakat. Perspektif kepimpinan dan TVET, karakteristik kepimpinan, peranan, cabaran, kejayaan, strategi dan aspirasi tujuh orang pemimpin tertinggi TVET dalam melonjakkan kejayaan TVET di Malaysia adalah antara pencarian di dalam kajian ini. Keperluan kajian ini penting memandangkan terlalu sedikit kajian dijalankan terhadap mereka. Kajian ini dijalankan terhadap 7 orang pemimpin tertinggi di pelbagai organisasi TVET di Malaysia dimana mereka mempunyai pengalaman yang luas dalam memimpin TVET. Kaedah pengumpulan data adalah temubual separa berstruktur secara mendalam berpandukan protokol temubual yang dibina. Pengalaman hidup mereka di analisis secara pengkodan dan analisis manual dan juga penggunaan perisian pengurusan data seperti NVivo 8. Interpretasi dapatan kajian dilakukan secara kaedah tematik dan hasilnya sebanyak 7 tema dan 18 subtema telah ditemui. Soalan kajian pertama mendapati pendidikan TVET diertikan sebagai bidang yang memerlukan kebolehan berfikir dan juga kebolehan teknikal manakala kepimpinan didefinisikan sebagai himpunan maksud memimpin yang pelbagai. Soalan kajian kedua menemui karakteristik kepimpinan pemimpin TVET melalui kebolehan pemimpin melalui konsep teori manakala karakteristik kedua menemui empat kompetensi pemimpin TVET. Dua cabang peranan pemimpin TVET samada peranan diperingkat antarabangsa, organisasi dan masyarakat serta peranan pemimpin TVET yang efisien menjawab soalan kajian ketiga. Soalan kajian keempat menemui dua cabaran yang harus didepani oleh pemimpin TVET iaitu ketidakseimbangan TVET serta masalah manusia. Organisasi TVET yang Berjaya boleh dilihat dari aspek kesedaran, graduan yang berektrampilan, berkemahiran dan berilmu serta kekuatan system pendidikan TVET bagi menjawab soalan kajian kelima. Soalan kajian keenam telah menemui enam langkah untuk mejadi organisasi TVET yang Berjaya seperti transformasi, penyatuan, mendapatkan sokongan pihak berkepentingan, kerjasama, perintis TVET serta peranan media. Aspirasi untuk pendidikan TVET pada masa akan datang menemui harapan keseluruhan pemimpin untuk menyaksikan lebih banyak kerjasama dengan industri serta pihak kerajaan dan pihak swasta dalam menjawab soalan kajian yang ketujuh. ‘Himpunan minda’ ini diekstrak sebagai resepi eksklusif untuk kejayaan TVET Malaysia dan memberi panduan kepada pengamal TVET untuk menaikkan lagi usaha memperkasa pendidikan TVET di Malaysia.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BPTV	Technical and Vocational Education Division Centre
CIAST	for Instructor and Advanced Skills Training
CEDEFOP	The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
DSD	Department of Skills Development
EPU	Economic Planning Unit
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
ILO	International Labour Organization
JPPPKK	Department of Polytechnic Education and Community College
JPTek	Department of Technical Education
HRM	Human Resource Management
KEMAS	Community Development Department
MBOT	Malaysian Board of Technologist
MLVK	National Training Vocational Council
MP	Malaysia Plan
MPT	Maktab Perguruan Teknik
MQA	Malaysian Qualification Agency
NEP	New Economic Policy
NDTS	National Dual Training System
NITTCB	The National Industrial Training and Trade Certification Board
NTSS	National Technical Skills Standard
NYPC	National Youth Pioneer Corps
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SPM	Malaysian Certificate of Education

TVET	Technical, Vocational, Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCO-UNEVOC	International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VOCATIONS	Vocational Information System on Training
WBL	Work-based learning



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this introductory chapter, the focal attention is placed on the role High-ranking Leaders play, especially when directing organisations, in the global and TVET perspectives accordingly. This chapter also highlights the pressures of being the leader and High-ranking Leader, in the context of the organisation that they lead. The main idea is to establish the significance of their leaders characteristics for the contribution of TVET organisational excellence educational specifically for exploration and improvement purposes

1.1 Introduction

In the midst of a shaky and conflicting situation, employees tend to place their faith on leaders as they have often been judged to demonstrate competence and ability even in the most critical condition (Geressu, 2014; Nixon, Harrington, & Parker, 2012). Leadership is necessary everywhere; it is the reason behind most organisational successes globally after facing severe failures. Such instances are substantiated by the stories behind APPLE, CHRYSLER and MARVEL, whereby their respective dire situations have been rectified by great leaders and successful leadership. Such phenomenon has occurred throughout time since the early human revolution, with the timeless tales of Tutankhamun the Sun Ruler, Alexander the Great, and Genghis Khan's Mongolian empire conquest. The history behind these remarkable leaders has served as the basis for leadership in today's era.

The roles of leaders have been widely emphasised in any organisational setting (Wooldridge, 2011). Both industrial and educational perspectives have highlighted the satisfactory level of their actions based on certain demands, challenges and obstacles (Wooldridge, 2011; Jacobson, 2011). Being a leader is very challenging due to the expectations for them to bridge and connect people, boost motivation, dispute status quo, persuade organisational members, channel information, manage resisting and misunderstood workers, and uphold societal duties (Lunenburg, 2011; Wooldridge, 2011; Unin, 2010). In today's arduous organisational landscape, such chameleon-like roles demand for leadership equipped with countless skills. This amalgamation of recipes for success extends beyond the horizon of established comfort zones to transform organisations.

However, in the fast changing education landscape the associated roles have expanded wider, which can be illustrated various methods. They include: creating learning experiences and meaningful classroom instructions, acting as a role model, striving to maintain academic credibility, being more culturally sensitive for personal development, and designing organisation aiming for student achievement (Jacobson, 2011; Spendlove, 2007). Every year, various education frameworks having unwarranted objectives have been produced across different countries. Therefore, these grand objectives can only be undertaken by extraordinary individuals capable of initiating and implementing changes despite their own will (Jensen & Granger, 2013, p. 15).

There is negligible difference between the roles of leaders both global and TVET settings; they often exhibit the drive for results in firms and people in their respective circumstances (Brennan, 2014; Khatajabor, Minghat, Maigari, & Buntat, 2012 ; Rowley & Ulrich, 2012). Similarly, leaders in higher education generally portray innovative characteristics as a response towards their volatile landscape, which is also the behavioural creativity competencies to be demonstrated by TVET leaders (Geressu, 2014; Middlehurst, 2012).

Upstaging professionalism and knowledge is the orthodox education system that often discredits TVET as the spot for the under-achievers, non-performer, and under-scorer, deemed as 'forever dead' (Brennan, 2014; City & Guilds Centre for Development (CSD) & The Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET), June 2011; Feinberg & Horowitz, 1990). In Malaysia, TVET

education is also largely deemed as future-less for its pursuer (Sobri, 2013). The judgemental assumptions has been circulating over an extended period, but some countries have recently started to recognise its crucial role in building the economy, people and country (UNESCO, 2010, p. 4; CSD & COTVET, June 2011). However, this polemic has been slowly discarded ever since TVET has been acknowledged as a viable career path towards a successful career (Omar & Krauss, 2011). Despite being labelled as an erratic field, TVET is gaining momentum and those who champions its development can be acknowledged as a truly resourceful personnel (Kechik, 2011).

To raise the quality and image of TVET, leadership and leaders are crucial and complementary components that spur both the internal and external responsibilities. This includes maintaining employee commitment, building a stable environment that fosters a positive image, being responsive and dynamic, and open to changes. Additionally, it also involves building of strategic partnerships and changing the institutional perceptions by media, political circles and stakeholders (Brennan, 2014; Rabindarang, Bing, & Yin, 2014).

A content analysis on UNESCO-UNEVOC's 'Transforming Idea to Action' has revealed the pivotal moves leaders should take to boost TVET's image and drive it towards excellence. It is inclusive of reinforcing TVET education by facilitating various design, implementation and monitoring strategies. Additionally, TVET organisational excellence can also be achieved by improving its access by advancing learning opportunities and promoting research and publication (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2012).

In today's scenario, the insignificant issues create a pressure for Higher Education Institution for instance, trying to compete for university ranking (Hallinger, 2014). Institutions are expected to perform efficiently and proactively, which is a common and crippling pressure in managing education (Hawkin, 2009). Alongside these demanding requests, the autonomy power given to high-ranking leaders during their decision making processes is not a 'free gift'. Behind the power, various attached strings, control and limitations are implicitly present; the more power bestowed comes with more responsibility and accountability (Christensen, 2010; Mok, 2010). Hallinger (2014) has explored a case in East Asia further, revealing that pressures pile up due to leaders having to attain excellent ratings in the new performance management system. Known as Key Performance Indicator (KPI),

it is one of the components demanded to satisfy stakeholders. Moreover, brand management and institutional positioning are reliant upon positive image ratings achieved on the scale of excellence from customers. As a high-ranking leader in higher education, vice chancellors have admitted that the words ‘customers service’ is the least mentioned phrase. However, their reputation must be boosted, requiring the twofold actions of supporting staff’s benefits in working together to generate positive image, and subsequently benefiting customers from it (Wooldridge, 2011). Furthermore, leaders are believed to be trained to have expansive vision that is sensitive of any possible pitfalls and are able to gather information and discern their surroundings (Kantabutra, 2010).

In the 21st century, leaders are expected to undertake various roles and tasks, which includes being the agent of change for higher education (Hallinger, 2014; Muller & Casper, 2000). The agent of change perspective is expressed from various angles for leaders in either normal or academic organisations. They must be role models who portray good characters, can create and articulate clearly their visions for a particular organisation, and empower their followers to meet higher standards. These requirements allow followers’ trust to be obtained so as to build integrity and a meaningful organisational life. In contrast, a faculty leader’s point of view regarding agent of change includes organising intellectual forums, partnering with external stakeholders, and garnering resources and support through grants.

The role also demands professional development and hiring of like-minded agent of change by upholding existing networks, leveraging course curricula, harnessing the classroom as a vehicle, working with and mentoring students, and using data and research to persuade society (Northouse, 2013; Kezar & Lester, 2014). With respect to these demanding requests, the appropriateness for the selection of high-ranking leaders like vice chancellors for the purpose of education reformation are often pondered upon (Sirat, Ahmad, & Azman, 2012). Such circumstances are a testament of the necessity of true leaders who can pioneer the change and drive institutions towards excellence.

1.2 Background of the Study

Leaders must be intuitive and able to perceive TVET trends, future niche areas and technological requirements in advance so as to facilitate organisational growth and prepare the field for any possible challenges (Brennan, 2014). TVET is also subjected to revolutionary changes alongside the transformation happening in the education system (Othman, Hamzah & Udin, 2011). The processes are driven by various organisational challenges and changes occurring internally and externally both (Ismail & Hassan, 2013; City & Guilds Centre for Development (CSD) & The Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET), 2011; Wilson, 2006). For those who are pursuing career paths as a leader, many challenges await; they include ensuring stakeholder satisfaction, globalisation, funding, technological advancement, job satisfaction, motivation and commitment (Eckert, Stawiski, & Zhao, 2014; Hallinger, 2014; Sirat et al., 2012; Givens, 2008).

Leaders are a vital component in directing an organisation's process, whose role is not limited to transferring orders from manual instruction. Encompassing across various dynamic engagements between leader and stakeholders, the task of satisfying the stakeholder in particular has been termed as 'tricky triangle' (Winter, 2006). The specific issue has been mentioned in various sources (Argia & Ismail, 2013; Nixon, Harrington, & Parker, 2012), simply due to it being one of the most frequently faced challenges by leaders globally (Eckert et al., 2014). Therefore, they are expected to deliver the institutional agendas clearly, bridge related parties, and lead towards the finest ranks (Hallinger, 2014; Argia & Ismail, 2013; Nix, 2012; Nixon et al., 2012). Such task is extensive and beyond the components of conventional education, but the current supply-demand requests for skilled workers has caused for TVET education to be focused upon. This is to ensure that the pressures are solved, secondary to the challenges of globalisation.

Globalisation is the process that widens the extent, access and form of cross-border transactions among people, goods and services, or assets that deepens economic interdependence between countries (Al-Roudhan, Nayef, & Stoudman, 2006). Large organisations generally invest in the nations, providing job opportunities and reinforcing the need for TVET education to churn out trained work force to accommodate the market (Wilson, 2006). Globalisation has caused leaders to review all aspects of the education system that require improvements, including

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